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Peter Stevens

Reference Librarian
Foster Business Library
University of Washington



Born when and where: Springfield, Mass., way back in 1943.

Current residence: Since 1974 in glorious Seattle.

Education: BA, English Lit., cum laude and with honors, UMass, 1965; MS, LS, Simmons College, 1969; Vietnam, 1967-68.

Summary of job experience:

Harvard College Library Acquisitions, 1965-66, head of monograph receipts; US Army Intelligence, 1966-68, intelligence analyst; Harvard College Library Cataloging, 1968-70, monograph cataloger; Harvard College Library Acquisitions, 1970-72, assistant to head of acquisitions; University of Calgary Acquisitions, 1972-74, head; Seattle Public Library Acquisitions, 1974-76, head; University of Washington Acquisitions, 1976-98, head; University of Washington Foster Business Library, 1998-, reference librarian.

Family: Wife Cynthia, also a librarian.

Most recent accomplishments: Began a new phase of my career as reference librarian after decades in acquisitions. Winner in the 40+ age group, advanced division, of the **Vertical World** spring 1998 climbing competition (also beat all the 30 year olds and all but five of the 20 year olds) at age 55. Hiked 300 miles last year, gaining 125,000 vertical feet; bicycled 4,000 miles; climbed over 100 days.

Most recent goal attained: Hiking, climbing and cycling again regularly after December ankle surgery for old Vietnam injuries. Leading 5.10c climbs again. Able to deal with reference questions in my new job and do bibliographic instruction and having great fun doing both.

First job: Paperboy for six years, starting in junior high, when newspapers cost a nickel. My first public service experience.

Biggest recent surprise: How much fun reference and public services work is and how gratifying it is to be in direct customer service with appreciative library users. Not like technical services at all!

Fondest Memory: Last summer's two weeks of hiking in the Austrian Alps. Or maybe the previous summer's two weeks in the Dolomites of northern Italy. Or maybe earlier hiking trips to Saas Fee, Zermatt, Cortina. Or maybe

Favorite pastimes: Climbing, hiking, cycling, sea kayaking, skiing, gardening, reading, classical music.

Last book read or literary tastes: Anything by Bill Bryson, Jonathan Raban, Paul Theroux, Martin Amis, Elmore Leonard, John Mortimer.

What would you like to be doing seven years from now: Reflecting on the joys of having been retired from work for several months with so much more time for all my sporting activities!

Had I but world enough and time: Live in Italy year round with my wife and BMW, playing Chopin on a grand piano, climbing all the peaks.

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strate what DVD does well. Lang's "M" was filmed in 1931 in black and white. Today, most VHS and 16mm prints of the film are grainy and washed out. The DVD version is the most clear and pristine version I have ever seen. There is a tremendous modulation between the blacks, white and grays and one can actually see details in the lighting. "The Piano" DVD shows a great deal of depth within the frame that is never evident in even the best video copy. During the jungle scenes, for instance, the foreground, middle ground and background are clearly visible and details extend throughout the image. The quality of the picture is almost three-dimensional, creating a sense of space that one gets when watching the film in its original form. It still isn't film, but it comes closer to anything I've seen previously. This is due to the picture size and pixel aspect ratio of DVD versus the NTSC video and a resolution of over 500 scan lines which is a higher number than the typical NTSC video.

What are the disadvantages of DVD?

For now, the main disadvantage is lack of product. It will take years for the same number of titles that are currently available on VHS or laserdisc to become available on DVD. Currently, the only titles one can buy are feature films, music videos and some adult titles. Also, not all of the studios are willing to release their product on DVD. **Disney**, for instance, has not yet committed to any titles to this format. Also, the thousands of educational titles that are used by colleges and universities are several years away, if ever, from being available. **Films for the Humanities & Sciences**, for instance, is considering the implications and costs of making titles available in this new format. As of now, they are debating whether to go with DVD-Video or another variation of the DVD format. It will take a leader in the educational market, such as FFHS, to help make the DVD format a widespread success like the videotape. If the DVD is to go beyond the specialized market, which the laserdisc never succeeded in doing, products from both the feature film market and educational markets must be readily available.

Other disadvantages of the DVD that should be considered are: at this point, they don't have recording capability, although this will change if the demand becomes greater; current players do not play in reverse at normal speed; distributors have added copy protection and regional lock-out devices to the players. That means that a disc purchased in the U.S. will not necessarily play in Japan and vice-versa. This may be a problem for those who collect materials from overseas to support foreign language curricula. Also, the Macrovision system used causes some color and picture problems.

What is DIVX?

To complicate matters, Divx has been created as a kind of rival format and the result is slowing down the DVD boom. **Circuit City** and a Hollywood law firm are behind the development of the divx format which is basically a pay-per-viewing period variation of DVD. The viewer needs a different player in order to watch a divx disc (a divx player will play a DVD disc, but not the other way around). If someone wishes to watch a divx disc, they go to the store and buy it for about \$5.00 as compared to the average DVD price which varies from \$14.95-\$29.95. The player must then be hooked up to a telephone line so that it can call an 800 number. The disc can then be watched for a 48-hour period. If the viewer wishes to watch it beyond that 48-hour window, they must call the number and have it unlocked for another 48-hour period. The advantage of the divx is that the disc need not be returned (unlike renting a video); however the disadvantages seem to far outweigh the advantages. For library collections, this format seems completely unacceptable because of its non-archival quality.

Weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the medium, the question of whether or not a particular library should begin to collect DVDs remains unanswered. To DVD or not to DVD? Well that depends. I feel that those libraries that support a fully developed film studies program should absolutely begin to collect DVDs; the high quality of the product outweighs the low number of titles that are currently available. Some faculty members will use feature films to help illustrate specific ideas in the classroom. In a case such as this, I would suggest that librarians log onto the **Image Entertainment Website** (www.image-entertainment.com) and see exactly what titles are available in order to determine future use and demand. If there are a more than 20 titles that are used on a regular basis, I would say that you should definitely consider purchasing DVDs. The next question will be to determine how many players to buy and where they will be housed. For now, it would make sense to limit equipment to the library and perhaps a couple of machines that can be floated or transported to classrooms. For those libraries that collect educational titles primarily with an occasional feature film, the time is not right for you. It is best to wait for the educational distributors to begin to get into the act before investing any money.

While the eventual goal for the industry is to see DVD replace all the other formats, it is at the very minimum a five-year project before something like that could happen. And even five years is probably too short an estimate. In the meantime, we'll have to continue to buy all the other formats and hope that DVD continues to make its presence felt. 🐼